Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI)

Michigan Education Information System (MEIS)

Direct Certification for Free School Meals

Frequently Asked Questions

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Questions?
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Q1. What is Direct Certification?
A1. Direct Certification is the process of certifying children who are members of households receiving assistance under the Food Stamp Program as eligible for free school meals without requiring the households of these children to complete applications.

Q2. Who is required to participate in Direct Certification?
A2. The Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004, (Public Law 108-265) amended the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act to require Direct Certification. Each local educational agency (LEA) must directly certify children who are members of households receiving assistance under the Food Stamp Program as eligible for free school meals, without further application, based on information provided in an electronic data file from the Department of Human Services (DHS).

This requirement is being phased-in over three years for public and non-public school districts:
*   For the 2006-2007 school year, this requirement applied to school districts with more than 25,000 students enrolled the prior year.
*   For the 2007-2008 school year, this requirement will apply to school districts with more than 10,000 students enrolled the prior year (for non-public districts, this includes the Archdiocese of Detroit).
*   For the 2008-2009 school year, this requirement will apply to all school districts.

Q3. How is the process for directly certifying students for free school meals changing for the 2007-2008 school year?
A3. The United States Department of Agriculture has provided grant funds to the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) to develop a new process to ensure that all local educational agencies (LEAs) in Michigan can comply with the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) Direct Certification requirement. Beginning in August 2007, a Direct Certification Report through the Single Record Student Database/Unique Identification Code (SRSD/UIC) Application will be available for all participating public school districts and the Archdiocese of Detroit. All other nonpublic schools will be provided access to the report in the following school year.

The Direct Certification Report replaces the data file of children of food stamp recipients who reside in ZIP code areas (provided by DHS) that MDE has previously mailed to local districts every summer. The new report will match data from DHS with student enrollment data reported by school districts in the SRSD. Matched students will be automatically certified as eligible for free school meals. Each LEA must then notify these households that the children, as directly certified, are eligible for free benefits, that no further application is necessary and the household must notify the school if it does not want free school meal benefits for these children. For more information, please refer to the *Eligibility Guidance for School Meals Manual* at
http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Guidance/default.htm.

Q4. Who has access to the Direct Certification Report?
A4. Any authorized user of the SRSD/UIC Application with the UIC resolver role will have access to the Direct Certification Report for his/her respective district or building.

Q5. When will the Direct Certification Report be available in SRSD?
A5. The first release of the Direct Certification Report will be available in SRSD beginning in early August 2007. The students included in the first release of this report will include those matched students reported as continuing during the End-of-Year 2007 SRSD Submission.

The data in the Direct Certification Report will be refreshed several times between August and October to include any newly matched students (kindergarteners and new enrollees) as reported in any NonSRSD upload. Also, the data in the Direct Certification Report will be refreshed in early December to reflect those matched students reported as continuing during the Fall 2007 SRSD Submission.

Q6. How will LEAs access the Direct Certification Report?
A6. Any UIC resolver will have access to the Direct Certification Report through the SRSD/UIC Application. Within the SRSD/UIC Application, there will be a link called ″Direct Certification″ in the toolbar of the application. This link will be made available in early August 2007.

Q7. Which students will be included in the Direct Certification Report?
A7. The initial release of the Direct Certification Report will include those matched students reported as continuing in your district during the End-of-Year 2007 SRSD Submission. The data in the Direct Certification Report will be refreshed several times between August and October to include any newly matched students (kindergarteners and new enrollees) as reported in any NonSRSD upload.

Q8. How are students matched between the DHS data and SRSD data?
A8. Students who are determined to be directly certified for free school meals are matched utilizing a sophisticated matching process that is currently part of the SRSD/UIC Application. The first step of the process matches the DHS data to the SRSD UIC Master database. This looks for matches against all students with UICs regardless of their current enrollment. The first pass looks for exact matches based on first name, last name, date of birth, and gender. Any students in the DHS file not matched in the first pass then proceed to a second step that applies a weighted match.

The next part of the matching process takes all students matched between the UIC Master and DHS file and attempts to match UICs based on the end-of-year SRSD file and any non-SRSD files. This essentially places a student in a district's report based on his/her most recently reported district of enrollment.

Q9. What report formats will be made available for the Direct Certification Report?
A9. The Direct Certification Report will be available in three formats: HTML, PDF, and CSV.

Q10. Will I still receive the compact disc of all children receiving assistance for my ZIP code area from MDE?
A10. No. The Direct Certification Report made available through the SRSD/UIC Application replaces the data file of children of food stamp recipients who reside in ZIP code areas (provided by the DHS) that MDE had previously mailed to local districts every summer.

Q11. How will kindergarteners and other new enrollees become directly certified?
A11. Districts will have the capability of submitting any newly enrolled students through a NonSRSD batch upload (please refer to the SRSD/UIC Application User's Guide for instructions on completing a NonSRSD upload). Enrollment dates and exit codes should be included in the file for purposes of Direct Certification. CEPI will refresh the data in the Direct Certification Report several times between August and October to include any newly matched students as reported in any NonSRSD upload. The data in the Direct Certification Report will be refreshed again in early December 2007 to reflect any additional matched students reported during the Fall 2007 SRSD Submission. These additional matches can then replace any paper applications that are already on file.

Q12. Will there be the ability to look at those students who did not have exact matches in the DHS data file?
A12. For the 2007-2008 school year this will not be available. CEPI anticipates providing the capability to do resolution on students who were not matched exactly from the DHS file for the 2008-2009 school year.

Q13. Will there be the ability to search by name or DHS case number to verify a student's eligibility?
A13. For the 2007-2008 school year this will not be available. CEPI anticipates providing the capability to search by a student's name in order to verify his/her eligibility for free school meals for the 2008-2009 school year.

Q14. Our intermediate school district (ISD) used to provide our school district with the data file to import into our point of sale (POS) system. What do we do now?
A14. The file of directly certified students will be made available for download through the SRSD/UIC Application. Users should work with the vendor of their local student information system and POS system to import this information.

Q15. How do we know that the state matching process will work?
A15. CEPI, MDE and MDIT have been working collaboratively to ensure a smooth transition to this new process. As part of testing, MDIT has matched a test file from DHS that included all children aged 0 to 26 years. Of this file, 90 percent of children ages 4 to 19 were positively matched to students in the UIC Master table (meaning 90 percent of the children in the food stamp file ages 4 to 19 have UICs). We also tested fall 2006 SRSD data and discovered approximately 7,000 students misreported as receiving reduced meals who should have been directly certified, and another 58,000 students state wide who would have been directly certified and were reported as not eligible for free or reduced meals. As a result, we are highly confident that this new process will yield significantly improved results.

Q16. Will DHS case numbers be provided in the Direct Certification Report?
A16. No. The DHS case numbers are required in the applications for free lunches. However, case numbers are not required if a child is directly certified.

Q17. What are the benefits to this new process for directly certifying students for free school meals?
A17. There are several benefits to this new process for Direct Certification of students for free school meals:

- Students' Social Security numbers will no longer be provided, improving program integrity and data security.
- Schools will not be able to view any students within their ZIP code areas who are not enrolled in their districts, further increasing data security and confidentiality.
- Schools will be able to view all students reported as enrolled in their districts and will not be limited by the current set of ZIP codes, which could exclude some students from being directly certified.
- Eligibility determinations and access to free meals for eligible students will be improved; verification efforts will be decreased.
- This new process will utilize a sophisticated matching process that is currently part of the SRSD/UIC Application to match the DHS data with school enrollment data.
- Local districts will no longer need to perform matching of their enrollment data to the data provided by MDE.
- The Direct Certification Report will be available through a secure Web-based application which will allow smaller LEAs, private schools and public school academies the ability to participate in the Direct Certification process.